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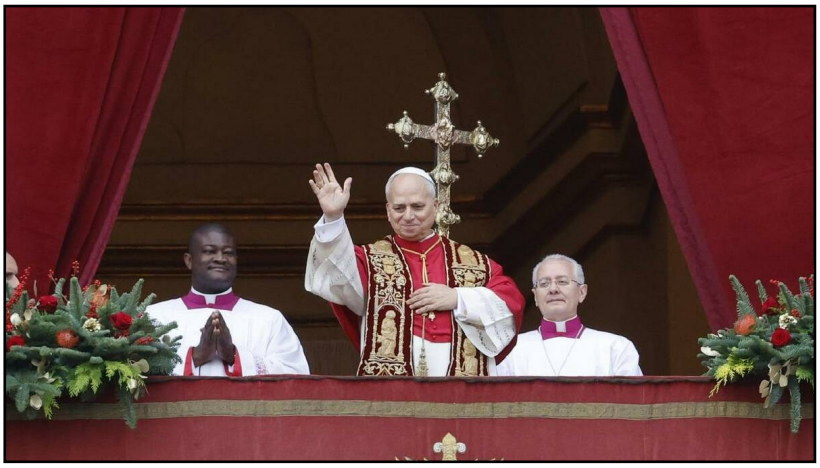
The Pope's Christmas Message



As the year drew to a close, Pope Leo celebrated Christmas morning Mass in St Peter's Basilica, and in his homily he looked at the terrible conflicts that blight the lives of so many, but looking to the future he said "a new day has dawned … and we, too, are part of this new beginning, even if few as yet believe it: peace is real, and is already among you."

Jesus, the pope said, sent His disciples as messengers of peace to reveal "the power to become children of God" who follow the Word that became human flesh – a Word that, in the Baby Jesus, "appears, but cannot speak." He continued, since God's Word became flesh, "humanity now speaks, crying out with God's own desire to encounter us."

"The Word has pitched His fragile tent among us. How, then, can we not think of the tents in Gaza, exposed to weeks of rain, and wind, and cold? And of those of so many other refugees and displaced persons on every continent? Or of the makeshift shelters of thousands of homeless people in our own cities?"

The Holy Father commented on the "fragility" of human flesh in all those suffering from war, and in the young people forced to take up arms, "who on the front lines feel the senselessness of what is asked of them and the falsehoods that fill the pompous speeches of those who send them to their deaths."

It is when the fragility of others "penetrates our hearts, when their pain shatters our rigid certainties," that peace has "already begun." This, he said, is how Christmas gives a fresh impetus to the missionary Church, urging her onto the paths traced out for her by the Word of God."

"This is the way of mission," the Pope said: "A path to others. In God, every word is an addressed word; an invitation to conversation, a word never closed in on itself. This is the renewal that Vatican II promoted, which will bear fruit only if we walk together with the whole of humanity."

"The movement of the Incarnation is a dynamic of conversation," Pope Leo said in conclusion. "There will be peace when our monologues are interrupted, and when we, enriched by listening, fall to our knees before the humanity of the other."

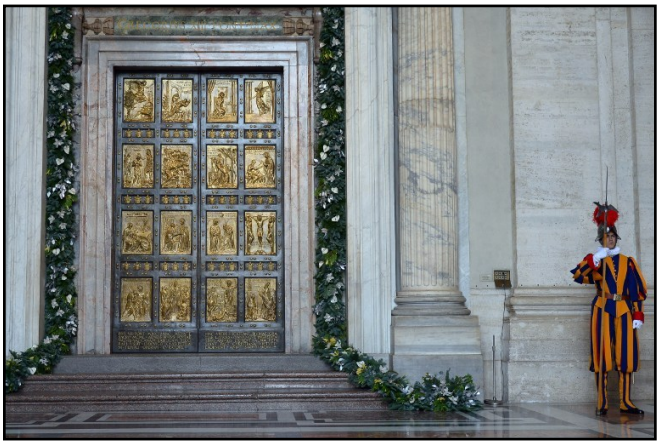
In his traditional message to "The City and to The World" the pope returned to the subject of conflict and peace as he prayed for justice, peace and stability for Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Syri, and Ukraine, asking that the strident sound of weapons cease and that the international community support those involved in finding the courage to engage in "sincere, direct, and respectful dialogue."

The pope spoke of conflicts that risk being forgotten, and he expressed closeness to the victims of war and violence in Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo. He spoke of all who suffer as a result of political instability, injustice, and religious persecution; of those victims of terrorism; of those living in Haiti and Myanmar, in parts of Latin America, Thailand and Cambodia whose lives are devastated by conflict. He prayed that, for the sake of the younger generations, countries be guided towards reconciliation and hope, and prayed that politicians leave room for dialogue for the common good rather than divisions of ideology or partisanship.

Pope Leo contrasted conflict with the true meaning of Christmas saying that "today, true peace has come down to us from heaven." He referenced his namesake Saint Leo who affirmed that "the Lord's birth is the birth of peace."

The Pope recalled that Jesus was born in a stable, that the Son of God was not welcomed. Jesus "was born in a stable because there was no room for Him in the inn," and that the Son of God, "through whom all things were created," was not welcomed. "Out of love," the Pope said, Christ "accepted poverty and rejection, identifying Himself with those who are discarded and excluded." Already in the birth of Jesus, the Pope noted, "we glimpse the fundamental decision that would guide the entire life of the Son of God… the decision not to leave us under the burden of sin, but to bear it Himself for us." At the same time, he reminded the faithful that peace also requires human responsibility. Quoting Saint Augustine, he said that "God, who created us without us, will not save us without us," adding that "responsibility is the sure way to peace."

Closing Jubilee Year Of Hope



As evening fell on 25th December, Cardinal Rolandas Makrickas, Cardinal Archpriest of Santa Maria Maggiore presided over the closing of the Holy Door in that Basilica, the ancient bell known as the "Sperduta", sounded across the local area. Outside, in the falling rain, the Cardinal announced that ""As we close this Holy Door, we believe that the heart of the Risen One, an inexhaustible source of new life, remains always open to those who hope in Him".

The Cardinal then ascended the steps leading up to the Holy Door and knelt in silence on the threshold for a few moments of prayer before closing the door. Although the Jubilee year was not to end officially till the feast of the Epiphany, the closing of the door of Santa Maria Maggiore on Christmas Day was poignant and appropriate as the Basilica is the resting place of what is traditionally recognised as the Holy Crib in which the newborn Saviour was laid.

Cardinal Makrickas spoke of the closing of the door did not signify the closing of divine grace because what remains open forever is the heart of our merciful God. "Today we saw the Holy Door close, but the door that truly matters remains the door of our heart: it opens when we listen to the Word of God, it expands when we welcome our brothers and sisters, and it is strengthened when we forgive and ask for forgiveness."

He went on to say that passing through the Holy Door was a gift which we should see as an opening of doors for others as our mission for the future, a grateful remembrance and a courageous mission.

In his homily, Cardinal Makrickas noted that the Holy Year was begun by one pope and concluded by another. This had only happened once before when the Holy Year of 1700 was opened by Pope Innocent XII and closed by Clement IX. In both cases we could see the "passing of the baton and of leadership that gives us the image of the life of the Church that never ends because the Lord never abandons His Church".

The Cardinal stressed that peace is possible for mercy is stronger than sin, and that hope is not an illusion, nor naïve optimism but rather "a concrete force that opens new paths". The Jubilee Year was not something to be tucked away in an archive but was rather an invitation to listen attentively to the Word. Mary's example is one to follow, she taught everyone that hope stems from welcoming God into life, welcoming the future without fear. He invited the faithful to translate the moments of the Jubilee into renewed prayer, attention to the needs of the poor, reconciliation of families, and a merciful presence in the community, so we may become "a Church with the Gospel in our hands and our brothers and sisters in our hearts."

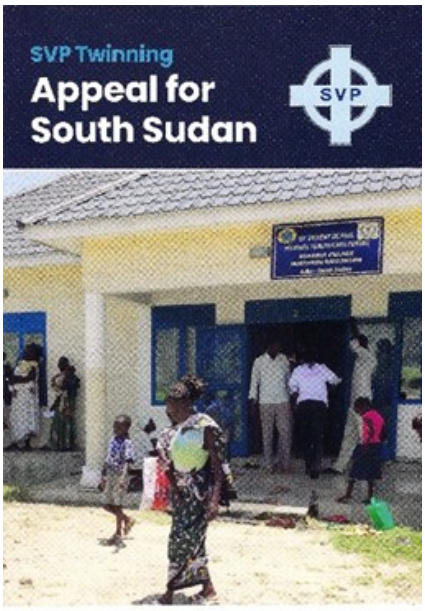
The Holy Door of Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore was the first to be closed. Two days later the Holy Door of the Basilica of St John Lateran was closed. This was followed by the closing of the Holy Door of St Paul Outside the Walls on the feast of the Holy Family. Pope Leo presided over the closing of the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica on the feast of the Epiphany.

Our own Diocese celebrated the close of the Jubilee Year of Hope at the Jubilee Year Shrine Churches within the Diocese. On the feast of St John the Evangelist, 27th December, Mass was offered in thanksgiving at St James', Reading, St Edmund's, Southampton, at St Joseph's, Guernsey, and at Bournemouth Oratory. In the Cathedral, the Bishop celebrated Mass for the closing of the Jubilee Year on Sunday, 28th December.

Bishop Philip also issued a Pastoral Letter on that day, devoted to thanking God for the graces given over the past Year. On the feast of Epiphany (6th January) a final closing Mass was celebrated for the Universal Church at St Peter's Basilica, Rome. The Mass was streamed from Vatican Television so that people throughout the world could join in the celebration.

Bishop Philip has expressed his thanks to Fr Anselm D'Mello who has organised Jubilee events around the Diocese. Fr D'Mello also thanked the shrine churches of the diocese for hosting pilgrims throughout the Jubilee Year, and he prayed that the blessings and graces received throughout the year may continue to bear fruit in the lives of all pilgrims and the life of the Church.

SVP: South Sudan Appeal



Sincere thanks to all who contributed so generously to the appeal on behalf of SVP members in South Sudan. The donations in cash and cheques from parishioners amounted to £2148, and Gift Aid will considerably increase that amount. Thanks also to those who donated on line or directly to the National Office Twinning Fund. Special thanks to the Whitchurch parishioners whose raffle raised £323. Donations to the appeal, or to other aspects of the work of SVP can be made at any time. Our parish has certainly done its share to help the SVP in England and Wales to raise a million pounds to fund the various vital projects.

The two main organisers of SVP projects in South Sudan are Bertram and Jino. They report that the security position, while still fragile, is a little more settled. The three Baby Feeding Centres last year catered for around 700 children. Unfortunately, the need for 2026 is assessed at around 1,000 children. The support of the appeal in England and Wales provides the funding for this vital work.

Other projects continue to be helped. Among recent improvements has been the installation of solar panels at the vocational Training Centre (VTC). Solar power is more environmentally friendly and significantly cheaper to run. The VTC's success means that the centre needs to be expanded. With the high rate of inflation in South Sudan the SVP carry out large capital projects in stages, using funds as and when they come in rather than waiting for all the funding to be in place before starting the job. If they waited the costs of materials would probably rise more quickly than the value of money coming in!

The Kworijik Internally Displaced Persons Camp was set up about ten years ago, after the village of Kworijik was attacked by marauding nomads – killing a number of villagers and destroying many homes. The camp is close to a military camp and this provides security. At Christmas Jino and his team were able to deliver essentials such as maize and oil.

It is inevitable that when appeals are made most of us feel that as individuals there is so little we can do. It is heartening when we hear of the genuine difference that our financial contributions can make to so many people. Let us keep the people of South Sudan, and indeed those living in poor conditions, in our prayers.

Thank You From CAFOD

Andrea Hoyland, the Diocesan Coordinator for CAFOD, has expressed thanks for the generous support shown throughout the diocese for the Harvest Appeal. Nationally throughout England and Wales a total of £1,168,516 has been raised. This included £655,348 collected in the 953 parish collections.

The money raised by CAFOD is spent helping the most needy of countries. But CAFOD has also been active in a different yet equally important way. When Pope Francis declared 2025 the Jubilee Year of Hope, he expressed the desire that a way be found to cancel the debt of the many low-income countries. In the last ten years the number of countries in what can only be described as a debt crisis, doubled from 22 to 54. Throughout the summer, CAFOD led a campaign in 459 parishes seeking signatures to a world-wide petition asking the government to act to ease the debt burden of those countries. A petition with 44,971 signatures was presented to 10 Downing Street in November. CAFOD will continue to lobby on behalf of countries in debt crisis.

Let’s Talk About the Synod

All parishes, and therefor all parishioners, had an opportunity to contribute to submissions made to the national submission put forward to the Synod. Many submissions were made, but it is evident that great numbers of Catholics shrugged their shoulders, let others get on with it, and perhaps asked themselves what the Synod had to do with them.

Mary Dunn, a parishioner at Our Lady and St Joseph, Lymington, a retired Clinical Psychologist and Spiritual Director, reflects on what the Synod has got to do with us.

“When we say, ‘what has the Synod got to do with us?’ – we read the Final Document *(For A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*) and discover that it is ALL about us and the Holy Spirit!

In our parish we have been gratified to see that the thoughts that were in our submission to the Synod have been mirrored throughout the world-wide church. So, the Parish in Lymington can recognise themselves in the Final Document, and this will be true for many other parishes who contributed their Submission.

In the Final Document, the members of the Synod said ‘The anointing by the Holy Spirit received at Baptism enables all believers to possess an instinct for the truth of the Gospel.’ (p 21 para 22)

The Church is dynamic, journeying and open. It is not contained in a series of teachings. It welcomes the reality of tensions and disagreements. They are seen as life-giving as long as we are listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit in a context of prayer. So, we no longer seek to arrive at a one-size-fits-all consensus, and neither do we accept to fall into opposing sides or factions. We wait to reach a place where we can say ‘It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us.’ (Acts 15:28)

If we are aiming to listen together for the voice of the Holy Spirit, we engage with the thoughts of EVERYBODY. The most shy and quiet, the ‘difficult person’, the person who doesn’t keep the rules, the creative and outspoken person – as well as the highly organised and conformist person!”

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There is to be a Day at the Wisdom Centre in Romsey entitled ‘Let’s Talk about the Synod’ on March 23rd 10-3.30. This day is open to anyone thinking of becoming involved in the Synod.

The Centre points out that many Parishes have been gratified to see that the thoughts that were in their submission to the Synod have been mirrored throughout the world-wide church. So, Parishioners can recognise themselves in the Final Document.

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This Day at the Wisdom Centre in Romsey will familiarise people with the Synod Final Document and introduce them to Conversations in the Spirit. We hope to begin to talk about ways forward!

To book this event email: reception@wisdomhouseromsey.co.uk
Tel:01794830206 (leaving a message if we are unable to take the call).

Diocesan Board of Trustees

Deacon Tony Darlison, Secretary to the Board of Trustees, reports on the December meeting of the Board. This is the fourth in an occasional series of articles and updates from him reporting on some of the business underway. We hope you will find it interesting to know more about the Board and its work on behalf of the Diocese. The Board last met on 11th December.

In line with our annual Board reporting plan, this meeting featured a series of reports from some of the key Committees and Vicariates. The Evangelisation Committee Chair presented a lively programme of initiatives in line with our ten-year mission plan *You Will be my Witnesses*; a particular highlight is that they are embarking upon a series of evangelisation case studies so that successes can be shared across the diocese. Good progress was reported on our work with Bamenda (featured in the last of these articles), Caritas, Vocations, and the Priests Retirement Fund. Trustees considered a draft Schools Strategy, which is progressing in line with the agreed process set out at the previous meeting, with a view to final approval in March 2026 after further feedback has been obtained from our schools about the detail. The Strategy is intended to align fully with the Diocesan Mission Plan, placing Christ at the centre of our schools as missionary communities. The Strategy sets a clear direction of travel towards academisation for all schools, in order to strengthen Catholic identity, improve resilience, and secure their future.

Trustees noted the significantly increased cyber-security risk facing all organisations and this is no different for our Diocese and parishes. Many parishes are already part of the Diocesan IT system however it is now essential that all parishes complete migration onto diocesan-supported IT systems and that all devices accessing diocesan systems are upgraded to Windows 11.

This requirement is part of our responsibility to care properly for people and the information entrusted to us. Using supported systems protects parishioners', clergy and staff personal data, and ensures that the systems parishes rely on for worship, pastoral care, safeguarding, finance and administration are as secure as possible. The Trustees agreed that the work should be completed by 31st March 2026. Further guidance will be sent to parishes early in the new year.

As usual, Trustees considered the financial position of the diocese. An adjustment to the formula for the 'Parish Contribution' (formerly known as the 'Levy') was agreed in principle, subject to consideration by the Council of Priests in the new year. It was noted that the Contribution does not cover all central costs but it is a vital part of the diocesan finances; it funds not only many of the professional services that are needed by parishes, but also our wider Christian life as a diocese led by our Bishop, such as the Bishop's Office, tribunals and vicariates. Trustees remain acutely aware of both the value of these activities, and the need for efficiency and value-for-money.

Concern was raised over Lloyds bank's plan to apply charges for issuing and banking cheques and depositing cash. The best way to avoid these costs is to use digital payment methods and planned giving (standing orders or direct debits) where possible, and everyone is encouraged to think about whether they can give to their parish in this way.

The investment Committee reported good performance from the new brokers who look after our investment portfolio. However, although these investments go some way to providing a prudent level of financial reserve (along with cash deposits), they are lower than they have been in recent years and as far as possible should be increased as part of our long-term financial strategy.

Trustees considered the safeguarding report. An internal audit has been undertaken of the case work that the team manages. This has been beneficial in highlighting good practice and identifying a few areas where some changes to process would be helpful as part of our continued endeavours to learn and improve the way in which we manage this complex aspect of diocesan life. The safeguarding team continue to manage a number of active cases, and we are grateful as ever for their efforts.

The Board will hold its next meeting in February.

While Shepherds Watched

Well, you thought that you had seen and heard the last of Unity Christian Theatre…Wrong!
In October, we regathered to raise funds for 'The Countess of Brecknock Hospice' and for' Mary's Meals'.
Three churches, St. John the Baptist, RC, St. Peter and St. Paul, CE, Thruxton, and Christ the King RC Amesbury invited us to perform, raising a total of £1,700 for our chosen charities.

Accompanied by our talented musicians, Marilyn Childs on keyboard and Sarah Hurcomb on flute, and ably supported by our Musical Director Peter Middleton, we sang our way through Roger Jones' Christmas musical, *'While Shepherds Watched'* unfolding the shepherd's story on the first Christmas night.

All the performers enjoyed the experience and we hope we did the audiences proud. A special word of thanks to our youngest singer/ performer, Casey Scott aged 9, who not only spoke clearly but looked every bit the angelic Gabriel as the shepherds spoke to their 'sheep'!

Many thanks to the Churches who allowed us to perform, to all the people who helped with stalls and refreshments and to the wonderful group of singers and actors who have committed their time and talents to rehearsals full of laughter. Lastly many thanks to the many people who supported us. We will return…!
Sharon Jameson (Director)

Downton Abbey— The Finale (2025)

This is Downton back on the rails and thundering down the track at full throttle with its whistle blowing. After the dismal pedestrianism of the previous cinematic outing, this film is truly a joy. On screen, it is now 1930, the Great Crash has taken place and although the Downton clan still have their money and the Abbey and Grantham House, their London town mansion, money is an ever-increasing concern. There's also a scandal that impinges on the Family's standing in Society. In short, this is a *jolly* good Downton mix and one given an excellent stirring by top screenwriter Julian Fellowes.

This quality comes through right from the start. Plot and action are woven into a narrative that draws you in and holds you taught like in a spider's web till the end credits. We start off in Summer 1930 in London at the height of the Social Season. The Downton Clan (Patriarch Hugh Bonneville et al) are all due to attend a Society party. Once there, the scandal erupts. The main Downton daughter, Lady Mary, has just received notification her divorce to her now former husband (no idea) has come through and the news has broken. She has to leave in disgrace, and she is now cast out of polite society.

Lady Mary returns to Downton and the family comes after when decent to do so. The rest of the film is set at Downton and this is the primary reason for the why and the how of this film is not only working but actually exudes almost impenetrable emotional wholeness. Think house built on rock as in the parable and the family drawing their strength from that.

With London being Act 1 of the drama, this rest of the film is Acts 2 and 3 and both flow as smoothly as they should. Act 1 has dropped the Family in it big-time. Acts 2 and 3 are how they pick themselves up and resolve it by the end. That is, how to get Lady Mary rehabilitated within, at least, County Society. Bit of a tricky one this. A dinner invitation to the County Society good and great, organised without her knowledge by Mary's sister, fails. All invitations are politely declined. What next?

The “next” is the forthcoming County Show and the entire Family (this includes the staff) swing into action to get her to give the top prize at the Show. That may sort out the peasantry but still leaves the County Society nobs. And this gets done by getting a film actor they know to come to dinner and for him to bring along Noel Coward, the top writer of all the shows in London. The Downton staff makes sure the word is spread and everybody invited is, oh, so happy, to also come. Between the County Show and Noel Coward in real life, Lady Mary may not be forgiven but is socially rehabilitated.

This is a film you can watch more than once and get more out of it – it's so well acted and simply so well put together. You will enjoy it every time.

John Newland

Caritas—Social Action Initiatives

The diocesan Caritas group has raised three very different Social Action initiatives they wish to bring to your attention.

The first is the January 15th deadline for applications to the Mustard Seed Fund. The Mustard Seed Fund is a small fund available to parishes starting new social action projects that would benefit from some seed funding to help with initial costs. Parishes can apply for up to £1500. Deadline for the next round of applications is Thursday 15th January 2026, the following round will be Wednesday 15th April 2026. Contact Caritas at caritas@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk for more details and an application form.

The second initiative is The Great British Bird Watch on Sunday 23rd January. Everyone is invited to be part of this large Citizens Science project run annually by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. It simply involves recording the birds in your garden on that day. Yu can help to monitor the health of the bird population. You can get spotting guides and full details from the RSPB website.

The third opportunity for social action links in with Sunday 8th February when we celebrate the feast of St Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of victims of slavery. We might not be aware of it but modern slavery is present in all our communities, and there is much that we can do to eliminate it, working to solve root causes and knowing how to spot the signs and how to report. The Caritas Portsmouth website a “Modern Slavery Resource Pack” with further information, prayer resources, and case studies.

Crozier, Mitre, and Ring

There are some aspects of Catholic liturgy, vestments and traditions which many Catholics are either unaware or unsure of. One area of uncertainty possibly lies in the significance of the bishop's mitre, ring and crozier. Recently, Fr. Stan Gibzinski, Catholic Chaplain to the University of Reading and a priest at the Parish of Our Lady of Peace and Blessed Dominic Barberi, was asked by the people of his parish about the various insignia that the bishop wears. This is what he wrote....

"In order to understand the meaning and significance of each of these items, it is important to know that the bishop is ordained – for the third time – once as a deacon, once as a priest, and finally as a bishop. Thus, the theological significance is that the bishop 'enjoys the fullness of the priesthood.' What this tells us is that every bishop – and thus every priest – is to become more and more transformed into Christ. The priesthood we share is firmly rooted in the one, eternal Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

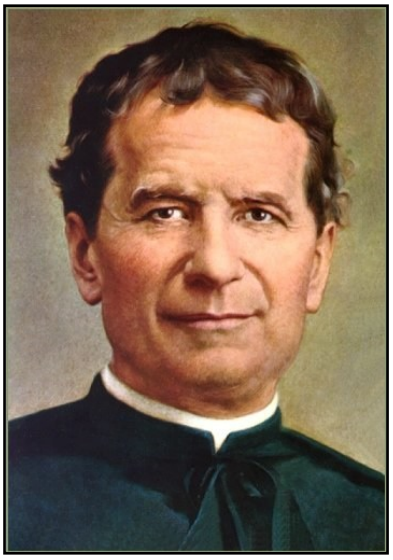
With Christ as our starting point, **the staff** or **crozier** takes its meaning from him, who told his disciples: "I am the Good Shepherd." (John 10: 11) A bishop is to be Christ in the midst of God's holy and faithful people, leading them to Christ, keeping them in the fold of the Church, and bringing new members into the Body of Christ. A staff naturally calls to mind the staff of Moses. With this staff, Moses worked many miraculous signs in the presence of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, to lead the people out of slavery into the Promised Land. (Exodus 4: 1-5) In many ways, the crozier is a symbol for Christ, who leads the bishop as he walks, so that the bishop is always in the footsteps of Christ, leading his people to the true and eternal Promised Land of heaven.

The mitre is also a highly symbolic form of headdress. It is worn only for liturgical celebrations. A good starting point for the significance of the mitre comes from the Book of Exodus, 39: 27-31 and Leviticus 8:7-9. There is clear significance that the one who wears it is 'Sacred to the Lord,' is consecrated, and set aside for the service of God's people. The mitre is formed by two stiff board, front and back, which are sewn together, and have two tassels, or 'lappets with fringes' that hang down from the back. The mitre represents the glory of the Lord which remains always with the Church and with the bishop. The front and back of the mitre represent the Old and New Testament, while the lappets represent the 'spirit and letter' of the Word of God. A bishop is not only to preach the Word of God but is also a defender of this Word. In order to do this effectively and credibly, the Word must take root within him, must become his very identity. This is what it means for the bishop to be fully transformed into Christ. During the ordination rite of a bishop, the Book of the Gospels is held over him, signifying that he is to find his shelter and life which flow from the Gospels – which flow from Jesus Christ. To further emphasize this symbolic purpose of the mitre, it is worn by the bishop during the Liturgy of the Word, and while preaching.

Finally, every bishop is given **a ring** when he is ordained a bishop. The meaning here is highly significant that by right of ordination, the bishop takes on a spousal relationship with those who are entrusted to his pastoral care. Just as Christ took his bride, the Church, as his spouse, so too, the bishop. A ring symbolizes not only union, but also fidelity. The ring symbolizes not only the union the bishop has with the People of God, but once again, with Christ. St. Paul tells us in the Letter to the Ephesians, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her, to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.' (Ephesians 5: 25-27).

Let us pray for our Bishop Philip so that he is more fully transformed into Christ, that he may lead and guide the People of God to also live the fullness of their own identity in Christ, which belongs to all the baptised!"

St. John Bosco



St. Giovanni Melchior Bosco, or as he is more commonly known St. John Bosco, was the founder of the Salesian Society. He was born into a poor family in Becchi, a hill-side village near Castelnuovo, Piedmont, Italy, on the 16th August, 1815.

When he was little more than two years old his father died, leaving the support of three boys to the mother, Margaret Bosco. He spent his youth as a shepherd but was fortunate to have a parish priest who recognised his intellect and ability and who instructed the young lad in reading, writing and the classical languages. Although the boy possessed a ready wit, a retentive memory, and an appetite for study, he was often obliged to turn from his books to the field to earn the money to keep the family. Despite the setbacks, the desire to learn was strong, and in 1835 he entered the seminary at Chieri and after six years of study was ordained priest.

After his ordination, Don Bosco went to Turin where he began his priestly mission. It was one of his duties to visit the prisons, and he was appalled on seeing children confined in these terrible places, abandoned to the most evil influences and with little hope of a life that did not lead them to the gallows. He resolved to devote his life to rescuing these unfortunates. On the 8th December 1841, an incident in his church led Don Bosco to befriend a ragged urchin called Bartolomeo Garelli. Don Bosco began teaching Bartolomeo, and soon other street urchins, drawn by the sort of kindness which they had never known, joined the group which Don Bosco called his "Oratory" since prayer was the central feature of the instruction he was giving. By 1846 the number of boys coming for instruction had grown to some four hundred. In the warm weather, Don Bosco took the boys for walks in the countryside where they would have a picnic meal. He realised that music had a great attraction for these wild children, and he organised a band for which he obtained old brass instruments.

Working with Don Borel, he acquired two rooms in the Rigugio, which he converted into a chapel dedicated to St. Francis de Sales. This gave his Oratory a home.

Economic decline hit the region, and factory closures saw large numbers of boys out of work. Don Bosco began night classes for these lads to give them a basic education. Sadly, he soon had to give up the rooms in the Rifugio. There were complaints about the character of the boys using the facilities, and he was obliged to move the Oratory from place to place. His determination to continue his work led to accusations that he was insane, and there were attempts to have him confined in an asylum. Eventually he found a rough shed on the site of which he built an Oratory which had some seven hundred youngsters attending regularly. Don Bosco took lodgings nearby, helped by his mother who sold all she had to support his work. Dormitories were built and the first Salesian home was created.

In time, the municipal authorities began to realise the importance of the work he was doing, and a fund was started to build technical schools and workshops. Later, and with much difficulty, funds were raised to build a church in the Valdocco quarter of Turin, which was consecrated to Our Lady Help of Christians. That same year, fifty priests and teachers who had been assisting Don Bosco formed a society under a common rule which Pope Pius IX approved in 1974.

Don John Bosco died in January 1888. He was declared Venerable in 1907, was beatified in 1929 and canonised in 1934. The Salesian Order now numbers over 16,000 Priests and Brothers working in 128 different countries. In the U.K. there are eight Salesian communities in Glasgow, Bootle, Bolton, Bollington, Cowley, Farnborough, Chertsey and Battersea.

Healing Prayers Group

The Healing Prayers Group meets in the parish church each Tuesday evening between 6.30pm and 7.00pm.
If you would like to choose a theme, scripture reading and music, or would like a copy of the El Shaddai Healing Prayer or if you would like any further information, please contact the parish office.

Papal Commission Says No to Women Deacons

In 2020 Pope Francis set up a Commission to consider whether women might be admitted to the diaconate. The Petrocci Commission's final report was released last month. It rules out admitting women to the diaconate. Below, you will find the article published by Vatican News; we have presented the complete article as we feel it is too important an issue to condense.

"The *status quaestionis* of historical research and theological investigation, as well as their mutual implications, rules out the possibility of moving in the direction of admitting women to the diaconate understood as a degree of the sacrament of Holy Orders. In light of Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Church's Magisterium, this assessment is strongly maintained, although it does not at present allow for a definitive judgment to be formulated, as is the case with priestly ordination."

The above is the conclusion reached by the second commission chaired by Cardinal Giuseppe Petrocchi, Archbishop emeritus of L'Aquila, Italy, which — at the request of Pope Francis — had examined the possibility of proceeding with the ordination of women as deacons and concluded its work in February. This is explained in the seven-page report the Cardinal sent to Pope Leo XIV on 18 September and which is now being made public at the Pope's request.

During its first working session (2021), the Commission determined that "the Church has, at different times, in different places, and in various forms, recognized the title of deacon/deaconess with reference to women, though attributing to it no univocal meaning." In 2021 the theological discussion unanimously concluded that "a systematic study of the diaconate, within the framework of the theology of the sacrament of Holy Orders, raises questions about the compatibility of the diaconal ordination of women with Catholic doctrine on ordained ministry." The Commission also unanimously expressed support for the establishment of new ministries that "could contribute to synergy between men and women."

In the second working session (July 2022), the Commission approved (with seven votes in favor and one against) the statement quoted in full at the beginning of this article, which rules out the possibility of proceeding toward the admission of women to the diaconate as a degree of Holy Orders, but without issuing "a definitive judgment" at this time.

At the last working session (February 2025), after the Synod had allowed anyone who wished to submit contributions, the Commission examined all the material received. "Although many interventions were submitted, the persons or groups who sent their writings numbered only twenty-two and represented few countries. Consequently, although the material is abundant and in some cases skilfully argued, it cannot be considered the voice of the Synod, much less of the People of God as a whole."

The report summarizes arguments for and against. Supporters argue that the Catholic and Orthodox tradition of reserving diaconal ordination (as well as priestly and episcopal ordination) to men alone seems to contradict "the equal condition of male and female as the image of God," "the equal dignity of both genders, based on this biblical reference"; the profession of faith that "there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28); and social developments "which promote equal access for both genders to all institutional and operative functions."

On the opposing side, the following thesis was advanced: "The masculinity of Christ, and therefore the masculinity of those who receive Holy Orders, is not accidental but is an integral part of sacramental identity, preserving the divine order of salvation in Christ. To alter this reality would not be a simple adjustment of ministry but a rupture of the nuptial meaning of salvation." This paragraph was put to a vote and received five votes in favour of confirming it in this form, while the other five members voted to remove it.

By nine votes to one, the Commission expressed the hope that "women's access to ministries instituted for the service of the community might be expanded thus ensuring adequate ecclesial recognition of the diakonia of the baptized, particularly of women. Such recognition will be a prophetic sign especially where women still suffer situations of gender discrimination."

In his conclusion, Cardinal Petrocchi highlights the existence of "an intense dialectic" between two theological orientations. The first maintains that the ordination of a deacon is for ministry and not for priesthood: "this factor would open the way toward the ordination of women deacons." The second, by contrast, insists "on the unity of the sacrament of Holy Orders, together with the nuptial meaning of the three degrees that constitute it, and rejects the hypothesis of a female diaconate; it also notes that if the admission of women to the first degree of Holy Orders were approved, exclusion from the others would become inexplicable."

For this reason, according to the Cardinal, it is essential, for continued study, to undertake "a rigorous and wide-ranging critical examination focused on the diaconate in itself—that is, on its sacramental identity and its ecclesial mission—clarifying certain structural and pastoral aspects that are currently not fully defined." Indeed, there are entire continents in which the diaconal ministry is "almost nonexistent" and others where it is active with functions often "coinciding with roles proper to lay ministries or to altar servers in the liturgy."

Report translated from the Italian original.

The Pope's Prayer Intention for January

At the beginning of each year, the Holy Father sets out the intentions for which he asks us to pray. For this month of January we are asked to pray for prayer with the Word of God:
Let us pray that praying with the Word of God be nourishment for our lives and a source of hope in our communities, helping us to build a more fraternal and missionary Church.

Reflections on the Pope's Intentions

"The instruction of the Lord is perfect, renewing life; the precepts of the Lord are enduring, giving wisdom to the simple." (Psalm 19:7)

The psalmist affirms that the instruction or teaching of the Lord (in Hebrew, "torah"), which is preserved in Scripture, provides an inexhaustible source of renewal and sustenance for God's people whenever they turn to its pages.

The psalm also hints that there are basically two ways to go through life. The first is to proceed by trial and error, making mistakes and painfully unlearning those mistakes, and thus slowly groping towards a hard-earned wisdom. The second way is simply to do what's right because it's God's will, leaning on the precepts of the Lord as a sure guide to the vagaries and challenges that life throws one's way.

As I look back on my schooling, I count myself blessed to have studied with some brilliant minds that broke open the Word of God for me. Outside of the classroom, I have also sat at the feet of great teachers or witnesses with little formal education that radiated spirituality and imparted "the wisdom entrusted to the simple." As I recall all of these wisdom figures with gratitude, I stand in awe of how Scripture is deeper than all our human striving and knowledge yet at the same time remains near at hand and accessible to humble souls that seek His face.

As we join the Holy Father in prayer this month, let us turn to the Word as our compass and daily bread, which faithfully guides and sustains us along the pilgrim highways that lead to our heavenly home.

Fr. Joseph Riordan, S.J.
Fr. Joseph is an Old Testament scholar and the president of Campion College in Regina, province of Saskatchewan, Canada

Retreat at St Bede's

Liza Nahajski and the Diocesan Pre-Discipleship Team invite you to "The Great Story of Jesus Retreat" to be held at St Bede's, Basingstoke, on Saturday 24th January 2026, starting at 10.00am and finishing at 3.15pm.
Start 2026 with a day retreat to reflect on the core of your faith, known as the 'Kerygma'. This is for everyone and may be particularly helpful for Journey in Faith or RCIA catechumens as they make the journey into the Catholic Church at Easter.

"In a time of great fragmentation, it is necessary to return to the foundation of our faith, to the kerygma'," the core of the Gospel: Christ crucified, died, and risen from the dead. And this applies first of all to us: To start afresh from the act of faith that makes us recognize Christ as the Saviour and which is expressed in all areas of daily life," (Pope Leo, Assisi - 20th November).

With reflections, prayer stations, short videos and some sharing the participants are allowed to move at a pace that suits them on their journey with no pressure to go faster. It will be led by Sr Margarida Mondral, Verbum Dei Community and the Ananias team. If you would like to know more contact Liza at: lnahajski@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk.
Some comments from last year:

- *A beautiful opportunity for focussing on various areas of my faith.*
- *Very much helped to increase my faith and reminded me of my discipleship.*

It's a very empowering and engaging spiritual journey for me.

Advent Mass for Healing

In one of his pastoral letters, Bishop Philip concentrated on the many forms of healing which can be received through the ministrations of the Church. He wrote of the salvation which Christ won for us by His Death and Resurrection, of the infinite mercy flowing from the heart of Jesus and of the obligation to care for the sick and the afflicted.

In his Letter, Saint James states that if anyone is ill, they should "send for the priests of the Church. Let the priests pray over them, anointing them with oil, and the prayer of faith will save the sick persons, and the Lord will raise them up, and if they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them." In other words, those in need of spiritual, psychological, mental, emotional and physical healing can turn to Jesus.

The Healing Mass which Canon Christopher will celebrate on Saturday 20th December is a Mass for everybody, for those in need of spiritual, psychological, mental, emotional or physical healing. It is surely no exaggeration to say that each of us, in our own way, falls into that category in one way or another.

Prior to the Advent Healing Mass last year, Fr Austin wrote that: "The Sacrament of the Sick does not just apply when someone is physically ill. It is for those who are suffering mentally and spiritually as well." Such services do, of course, also offer an opportunity for the sick and housebound to be brought to Mass and whilst there to receive the Sacrament of the Sick

The sacrament is administered during Mass, after the gospel and homily. The sacrament consists of two main parts: the laying on of hands on the head of the person, and the anointing with Holy Oil, the Oil of the Sick, on the person's forehead and hands. Everyone present at the Mass is entitled to be anointed, because we are all in need of healing in one form or another. The Advent Healing Mass will be at 11.00am on Saturday 20th December. The Mass is open to everyone and offers a splendid opportunity to accept God's healing mercy in preparation for Christmas.

Cathedral 150 Appeal

Canon James McAuley, Vicar general and the Dean of our Cathedral, is making an appeal for the 150th anniversary of the foundation of our Diocese of Portsmouth.

In May 2032, the Cathedral and Diocese will celebrate their 150th anniversary. The buildings on the Cathedral site, which include the Cathedral, Bishop's House, the Aula, and the Discovery Centre (cathedral hall, shop, and St Edmund House), need major repairs due to their age. Updating is also required to comply with the latest building regulations (e.g. accessibility). Priority will be given to urgent repairs to the Cathedral, which will cost in the region of £2.5 million.

The Cathedral150 Appeal was launched on the 1st Sunday of Advent (30th November) at 4pm with sung Vespers in the Cathedral, followed by a short reception in the Cathedral hall at which the Bishop and Cathedral Dean both spoke. The Cathedral parish is situated in the poorest part of the Diocese and the burden of maintenance of the buildings is beyond its limited financial resources. Consequently, Bishop Philip and Dean James McAuley will be seeking the support of Catholics across the diocese for our mother Church.

From The School

St John the Baptist School's Advent journey drew to a close with the lighting of the third Advent Candle on the Christmas Wreath. The pink candle symbolises joy, "Gaudete". It had been a journey filled with joy, light and a deep sense of community.

Key Stage 2 marked Advent with a Reconciliation Service, giving the children the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Canon Christopher spent the afternoon hearing confessions, helping all to experience God's mercy and forgiveness in preparation for Christmas.

Key Stage 1 children delighted their audience of family and friends with a wonderful performance of "Angel Express", retelling the story of the first Christmas. Year R created a magical scene as twinkling stars lighting up the night sky and leading the Magi towards the stable. Year 1 brought warmth and character to their roles as sheep and shepherds, the first to hear the Good News. Year 2 confidently led everyone through the story, reminding us of the importance of angels as God's messengers, bringing peace and joy. The performance was a joyful retelling of the Nativity.

Key Stage 2 pupils led the congregation of parents, friends and parishioners in a deeply reflective Advent Service in the parish church, guiding all through the Old Testament prophesies pointing to the coming of the Messiah. Through a thoughtful combination of Scripture, hymns, dance, [prayer and quiet reflection, they led the journey from darkness to light, reminding all of the hope which Advent promises. Their efforts created a beautiful service which offered a meaningful close to the school's Advent preparations.

The school has been actively involved in *Andover Trees United* since its inception over twenty years ago. Year 4 recently took part in a tree planting session at Bury Hill Meadows. They received a letter from Councillor Gordon Bailey thanking the pupils from St John's for their efforts and saying it was a privilege to join the children for the afternoon, and wonderful to see their enthusiasm for learning about the environment and the importance of trees in such a practical and interactive way.

The school is celebrating Outstanding Attendance; the attendance rate stands at 98.1%, which is 3.5% above the national average, and is ranked 2nd among Hampshire Local Authority schools and in the top 10% nationally. Many congratulations to the parents, pupils and staff of our parish school. The good wishes and prayers of the whole parish are with you in 2026.

Pope Dissolves Commission for Donations to the Holy See

Less than a year since Pope Francis established a Commission for Donations to the Holy See, Pope Leo signed a papal decree suppressing the Commission.

Pope Francis had intended the new commission to promote donations from the faithful, episcopal conferences, and other potential benefactors in support of the mission and charitable work of the Holy See.

In a decree presumably intended to reduce Vatican bureaucracy, Pope Leo writes, "The issue of donations and fundraising for the Holy See represents an important aspect of the bond of unity and charity between the particular Churches and the Apostolic See, particularly from the perspective of the effective exercise of the Petrine ministry."

The pope went on to note that the Council for the Economy, charged with overseeing the administrative and financial structures and activities of the Holy See "has devoted particular attention" to the study of fundraising for the Holy See, and made "several recommendations aimed at reshaping the current institutional structure responsible for managing this area."

After evaluating the suggestions of the Council and consulting experts, Pope Leo goes on to approve the content of the Council's "resolution and recommendations," beginning with the suppression of the Commission for Donations to the Holy See.

The decree releases all members of the commission from their functions, transfers all assets belonging to the commission to the Holy See, delegating to the President of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See the power to proceed with the liquidation of the Commission according to the current legislation.

In the decree the Pope Leo provides for the Secretariat for the Economy, together with a working group appointed by it, to be responsible for any issues that arise from the dissolution of the Commission, instructing them to keep the Council for the Economy informed of all measures undertaken for that end.

Another working group "will be established to formulate proposals regarding the general issue of fundraising for the Holy See, along with the definition of an appropriate structure. The Council for the Economy will propose the names of the members of this group, which will be submitted to the Roman Pontiff through the Secretariat of State."

Please pray for those who have died in December

Jane Jackson and Henryk John Nita

and for those whose anniversaries occur in January

James Mackrell, Kathleen Stefano, Margaret McKeever, Shelagh Barber, Nichola James, Arnold Baxter, Clive Baxter, Lilly Irwin, Mary Scott, Jack MacDonald, Thomas William Bush, Mary Glasspool, Albert Glasspool, Adelee Romersa, John Townsend, Eleanor MacPherson, Patrick Campbell, Edward Collins, John O'Donnell, Jim Hand, Barbara Barton, John Heyes, Charlotte Kempster, Kevin Murray, Kathleen Sullivan, Ellen Philomena Shepherd, William Randall, Clare Jeans, Margaret Murrane, Joseph Blundell, Sheila Lewis, Brian Doherty, Mr Balzic, Maureen Mansfield, Ronald Talbut, Kamil Lassow, Bridget O'Haire, Dorothy Rimell, Pauline Myers, Annette Muerelli, Marion Butcher, Peter O'Reilly, George Watkins, Tom Saunders, Earnest Graham, William Thompson, Alexander Mutton, Fr Nico Alleman SMM, John Morgan, Hannah Day, Raymond Donovan, Margaret Chase, Victoria Laugher, John Smith, Robert Newth, Sandor Lazlo Zalavolgy, Michael Murray, Mary Corr, Ivor Sellors, Leslie Whewell, Marjorie Jones, Bernadette Thorpe Louie Collins, Michael Fitzgibbon, Mary Ravenscroft, Patrick Adams, Edmund Smith, Marion Giddens, Tony Clemas, Patricia O'Hare, Ruth Parsloe, Kathleen Stafford, Kenneth Patterson, John Boyton, Rose Drugan, Edwin Bystranowski, Mary Comerford,Charles Holdway, Edward Waters, Walter Keen, Rudolf Biazo, Myrtle Hall, Thomas Lockyear, Thomas Davis, Jonathan Cronin, Gerard Denault, John Graham, Alan Ramsell, Miriam White, Dorothy Morton, Raymond Stevens, Archbishop Paul Verdzekov, Monique Regnier, Anna Samuels, Father Thomas Grundy**,** Bernadette Thorpe, Sandor Szereres, Teresa Johnson, Fr. Francis McAlindin, Fr. Colm Kelleher, Irene Coveney, Margaret Leach, Marjorie Pontet-Picolomini, Fr. Livinus Donohoe, Ivor Roach, Bernard Payne, Lettice Plowden, Carmen Suanes, Mary Sale, Archbishop Serge Miot, John Dunne, Mrs Pam Brown (Snr), Maria Borra, Margaret Mears, Esme Kelly, Eddie Flood, Christine Walton, Sheila Scott, Fr Peter Sprague, Ann Crozier, Kathleen Ayling, Sheila Allen, Christopher Kennelly, Ray Chase, Mieczslaw Satala, André Mussert, Penny Mussert, Lena Pietrzak, Bob Munnery, Joan Bruce, Paulette Jakob, Peter Mullaley, Andrew Ross, James Hayes, Fred Brasier, Jean Charlwood, Priscilla Evans, Margaret Fuller, John Parsons, Sheila Barber, Mary Smith, Nicholas Woodward, Rosa O'Reilly, Tim Sellors, Albert Bullough, Eve Cook, Valerie Harvey, Mabel Glenn, Michael Pearce, John Wilson, Rosemary Johnson-Ferguson, Jim Cullen, Claire Treneman, Gerald Woodward, Tony Hughes, Audrey Francis, Winnie O'Grady, Pauline Richards, Angela Ramsell, Antoinette Thomas, Jean Sherlock, Therese Ayres, Jean Arnold Jones, Paul Bond, Peter Chen, Rosemary Gallagher, Josephine Kane, Lyvette Hicks, Teresa Thorpe, Emmanuel Scicluna, Judith Polley, Collette McIvor, Michael Ftzgerald, Victor Trapani, Jules Denée and Donald Walker

During the month to come please remember in your prayers

the following who are sick:

Esme Coveney, Rita Lane, Margaret Williams, Patrick Arnold, Mary Oak, Fiona Hilleard, Bernard Ivinson, Tony Fabian, Helen O'Connell, Douglas Manning, Diane Mahoney, Sile Monnely, Rita Casey, Rose Bull, Carol Keenan, Eileen Wharton, Oran Keenan, Margarita Hardiman, Tom O'Regan, Robert Colledge, Eileen Price, Concepta Cuddihy and Frank Hinds

and all those in need of prayers.

If you know that anyone on this list is now happily recovered, or if you would like a name added to this list, please contact the editors.

PLEASE NOTE

Articles printed in *The* JOURNAL are printed in good faith and are not necessarily the views of the editors. Contributions must be accompanied by full name and address, which may be withheld on request. The editors reserve the right to amend all contributions. Please support our advertisers, they support us.

ENDPIECE

Many thanks to the various contributors to this month's *The* JOURNAL. The next edition will be issued on 7th & 8th February. Contributions should be with the editors by Monday 2nd February. Please leave contributions at the Presbytery or email them to: stjohnsjournal@googlemail.com